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SUBJECT: NDI POLL OFFERS INSIGHT INTO IMPROVING DEMOCRACY  
IN NEPAL

Classified By: (U) Classified by: Ambassador James F. Moriarty; reason  
1.4 (d)

#### SUMMARY

1. (C) In a public opinion poll conducted between May and July 2004 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), 95 percent of respondents believed things in Nepal were going in the wrong direction. NDI's survey reports Nepali citizens' perceptions of the current government, democracy, and possible elections and steps towards ending the insurgency. The numbers in NDI's survey should be viewed as trends, rather than as definitive, due to the number of individuals who refrained from responding due to fear of reprisal from either side. The report offers a unique perspective on the perceived character of various players, both in the government and in the Maoist rebel leadership, while also showing the public's desire for peace talks with the Maoists, willingness to hold elections and to push for change. Above all, the survey shows the people's desire for peace. We are forwarding to the Desk and INR the powerpoint presented and the statistical analysis. END SUMMARY.

#### DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL?

2. (U) Public views on the current condition of democracy in Nepal seem rather bleak. When asked to rate the state of democracy in Nepal on a scale of one to ten (ten meaning the country is fully democratic), 70 percent of respondents rated Nepal between zero and five -- decidedly undemocratic. 66 percent of respondents also asserted that Nepal is generally worse off now than it was during the Panchayat system. (NOTE: Nepal made the switch from a Panchayat system to a constitutional democracy in 1990. In 2002, Prime Minister Deuba dismissed the Parliament. Currently, Prime Minister Deuba, with the King's endorsement, has assembled a coalition government. END NOTE) The primary reasons cited by respondents for this deterioration are increases in both corruption and crime. Maoist violence was also cited, but came in third with half the votes of the above reasons. This negative outlook on government is not surprising in light of the respondents' view of political parties. The majority of participants considered the four leading parties to be corrupt, too close to the king, and more likely to govern on behalf of themselves than in the interest of the people. Despite apparently negative views with regard to the current system and political parties, however, over three fourths of all respondents believed some form of democracy to be the best system of government for Nepal.

#### ELECTIONS

3. (U) When respondents were asked whom they would vote for if elections were held today, interesting results emerged. The leading party was the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), followed by Nepali Congress (NC), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and Nepali Congress-Democratic (NC-D). When asked whom they would elect if the Maoists were included on the ballot, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoists) emerged third with only eight percent of the vote. A large number of respondents refrained from answering either question. In fact, when asked whom they would vote for if the Maoists were included on the ballot, the number of "Do not want to say" rose from 30 percent to 36 percent.

4. (C) Scott Kearin, the country director for NDI, said in a recent meeting with Ambassador Moriarty that he hopes some of NDI's findings will make their way into the public domain in Nepal. Kearin believes that if Maoists learn their party holds some public appeal, the discovery may provide the impetus needed for Maoist leaders to reintegrate the group back into the system and run as a political party in the next national election. Ambassador Moriarty, however, cautioned that eight percent support might not be enough to attract the Maoists, who think they control eighty percent of the country, back into the political process.

5. (C) Kearin also emphasized during the meeting that Maoists

need to be convinced that now is the time to get back into the political process. NDI suggested that one way of encouraging the Maoists to endorse elections would be to hold elections first in the districts in which Maoists are able to move freely, providing an environment in which Maoists feel they would receive a favorable outcome. The international community would then have to be involved to ensure a free and fair election. The Ambassador again raised concerns, saying that elections cannot be held until the Maoists are willing to lay down arms, and that the likelihood of Maoists accepting a minority position in a coalition government is doubtful, particularly based on their views of power sharing.

(NOTE: Interestingly, 51 percent of participants had little or no trust in the Maoists to establish a multi-party system if they came to power; 30 percent did not answer. END NOTE.)

16. (U) Poll participants appear ready for elections. Overwhelmingly, 83 percent of those asked were in favor of holding elections this year. The conditions under which respondents desire elections to be held are also clear. 93 percent believed elections should be held only during a cease-fire. Views regarding the conditions under which the Maoists would be allowed to participate in the election, however, were less clear -- with almost an equal split on whether or not Maoists should be able to participate under any circumstances.

#### MAOIST INSURGENCY

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17. (U) Although the Maoists do not enjoy mass appeal, NDI's survey shows the group still holds some sway with the public. When asked whether they held a favorable or unfavorable view of the Maoists, 18 percent of respondents said they held a favorable view. When read a list of stated goals of the CPN-Maoist party, the approval rating for Maoist goals was 47 percent (NOTE: These goals were stated as free and compulsory education for all, free health services, an end to caste discrimination, etc. END NOTE). 21 percent of those polled even approved of Maoist tactics. (NOTE: All approval ratings are a combination of "strongly approve" and "somewhat approve." END NOTE.) Most notable was the finding that a total of 28 percent would be willing to accept a Maoist "People's Republic." A "People's Republic," however, was not defined and 26 percent did not answer this question.

18. (C) While the probability of peace talks between the GON and the Maoists remains unclear, poll participants indicated almost unanimously their hope for speedy negotiations. And although considerably more respondents (34 percent) said they trusted the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) than the Maoists (4 percent) to protect their community, an even larger percentage (42 percent) said they trusted neither the RNA nor the Maoists -- further underlining the need for negotiated rather than military solutions.

19. (U) If talks occur, another variable to address is exactly whom to involve in the negotiation process. While there remains an element of disagreement, overall poll participants were receptive to the idea of bringing in an international delegation to moderate talks. Among delegations mentioned, the United Nations was thought to be the most appropriate, followed by India and then the United States. (NOTE: When asked whether the United States was playing a positive or negative role in helping to resolve the Maoist conflict, 25 percent believed the US to be playing a positive role, 28 percent negative and 44 percent did not answer. END NOTE)

#### COMMENT

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10. (C) NDI's poll offers a window into the minds of citizens across Nepal. Results show that despite dissatisfaction with the current situation and the conduct of many of the major players (including the King), the majority of participants believe that negotiations, a cease-fire and elections -- after the Maoists have laid down their weapons -- could reinstate democracy and improve the situation in Nepal.

11. (C) NDI is using its study to reach out to the parties to help them craft their party messages. NDI has met with members of at least five political parties (CPN-UML, NC, Nepal Sadbhawana, RPP, and NC-D) to share the results of their survey. NDI Country Director Kearin mentioned that top aides of NC asked for an additional meeting to review the report probably because the poll showed that following the split between NC and NC-D, both parties were individually weaker than CPN-UML (the combination of those expressing preference for NC and NC-D is roughly equivalent to the poll's most popular party, CPN-UML). This finding may provide incentive for the two Nepali Congress factions to try and mend fences.

12. (C) While the NDI study is very useful, a few caveats should be considered. Only 62 of the 75 districts were included in the sample -- districts where the security

situation remains too difficult were not incorporated into the research. Also, due to the sensitivity of many of the questions and the general atmosphere of fear in Nepal, the surveyors assume that 23 percent of those questioned had reservations about answering questions, while 13 percent most likely did not express their true opinions. Still with 3000 people interviewed, the poll does represent an interesting perspective on current popular opinion in Nepal.

MORIARTY